

Ask Connie— The Illusion of Control

Connie Myslik-McFadden

Dear Connie -

I've been trying to figure out why so many things seem to go wrong in my life, and I can't. It's just one crisis after another. My parents were unhappy together—my Dad was an alcoholic and abusive to my mother—and I left home after high school. I didn't want to be like either of them, and I'm not.

But still, I've had two failed marriages, my son was arrested six months ago for selling pot, and my sixteen-year-old daughter is pregnant. Every time I think I'm back in control, something else bad happens. Can you help me?

—Sincerely, Janet

Dear Janet,

I can hear in what you've said that you've had a difficult, challenging life. If I could wave a magic wand so your life would instantly become easier, I would. However, there's a strong probability that even if you experienced temporary relief from your difficulties, there would be another crisis before long. Here's why:

There is no way for a child to make sense of, or cope easily with, the kind of home life you've described. Anyone growing up in an alcoholic, abusive family has experienced fear, insecurity, hurt, anger and confusion. I imagine you did your best to figure out how to have your basic needs met—safety, love, support. Without being fully conscious of

it, you inevitably came to conclusions about yourself and life that, while they may have been correct in your particular family, carried over into adult life.

Beliefs such as: men are powerful, women are weak; I can't count on anyone; I need to be perfect to avoid having aggression turned on me—these may have become operating principles in your life. This would be a natural consequence of your experience. In adult life, however, it's important to question these assumptions and the behaviors that accompany them. That's not something people do easily or without strong motivation.

According to the Pathwork (www.Pathwork.org), crisis is an attempt by nature to break down old, ingrained ways of thinking and behaving based on false conclusions so that there is the possibility for growth and change. (Pathwork lecture #183) The message of crisis is: change is necessary, readjustment is required, transformation is possible. If you are carrying misconceptions, buried emotions, negative attitudes and behavior patterns, crises will continue to occur until you understand and work to change these.

You may have left your family of origin at a young age, determined not to be like your mother or your father, but false beliefs about the role of male and female, about power and its



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misuse, about what you needed to do to survive in the world, may be still be unquestioned in your adult life. You mentioned, for example, trying to be “back in control,” which is a common goal among people who have been raised in a dysfunctional family. The myth is, “if I am in control nothing bad will happen.” This is an illusion—an understandable illusion, but still an illusion.

Very often people who try to maintain control are perceived as controlling by their spouses and children. Even if you haven't been abusive, have you tried to control the people closest to you? Have you tried to control life? Could this be what happened with your ex-husbands and your children? If so, it may have led to resentment and rebellion and, naturally, a crisis.

Every crisis has a meaning. When there is a crisis, we can choose to escape its meaning, or we can try to understand it and make an inner change that will

result in greater peace and happiness. If we continually try to escape the meaning of crises, eventually there will be a crisis we cannot escape, and it is likely to be devastating to us emotionally, physically, or both. Far better to face any crisis with the question, "What am I to learn from this?" than to refuse to face our inner difficulties in the vain hope that denial will save us.

If we deal with our inner conflicts, distortions, pain, anger, and resentment, we will, for the most part, be able to handle outer crises from a calm inner center. We will not be thrown by others' difficult behavior, though we may confront it; we will let go of trying to be in control; and we will allow necessary change to occur without trying to resist it. Ask yourself, today, what is it that I do not wish to see and do not wish to change, within myself? You cannot change others, but you can develop an increased capacity to look honestly at what disturbs you within yourself and become more willing to change.

It's also important to understand that you cannot make the necessary changes within yourself through force of will, or ego. We all need a helper or a group to help us heal ourselves. There is probably an Adult Children of Alcoholics group in your area, and there are knowledgeable, experienced professionals in most communities who offer individual and group counseling. It is also essential that you call upon your own Higher Self, the divine within, and your Higher Power, or God—whatever divine source you can connect with beyond yourself—and ask for guidance and assistance. If you are patient, and willing to be in truth, your life can be transformed.

—Blessings, Connie

Do you have a relationship question?

E-mail Connie at conniem@mcn.net, or call 406-582-7450 and ask!

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Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in Bozeman with 25 years of experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops, retreats and teaches Dream work and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing.

She is the author of "Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing." Pathwork (Pathwork.org) and Imago Relationship Therapy (www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.